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Pacification Gains Seen By Komer in Vietnam

Associated Press

The head of the United States pacification effort in Vietnam said yesterday "we can't help but do a better job in pacification than we did before" because Allied forces now have the "military initiative."

Robert W. Komer, who assumed the post 15 months ago, said "the Vietnamese can take over a very substantial role in what they can do best—pacification of the countryside."

Komer said the trend of the war has permitted the South Vietnamese Army to work more on pacification. He mentioned the figure of 57 battalions and said the Vietnamese "should and will increase their forces."

Earlier pacification efforts, Komer said, were "practically overwhelmed" by enemy military activity and "never really got off the ground."

"Now we have the military initiative," he said, "so you now have the military pressure off the pacifiers . . . room to maneuver and operate without main force attacks."

Komer, appearing on the news program "Face the Na-

tion" (CBS, WTOP) cited an increase in the number of roads open to passage—"about 90 per cent of the more important roads militarily."

He also said there have been 18,500 "returnees" from the Vietcong over the course of six months, compared to 20,000 for all of 1966.

The number of hamlets considered "secure" at the end of 1965 was 3900, he said, and 4400 at the end of 1966. He said the 1967 program has "moved fairly slowly," but said he had had no figures. He said the definition of "secure" was being reconsidered.

Komer, executive assistant to Gen. William C. Westmoreland, U.S. commander in Vietnam, said the request for more troops "does not necessarily mean you're not winning the war." He said additional troops would be used to "complete the process" of winning.

Enemy strength, Komer said, is not "constantly increasing" but "has really practically leveled off over the last six months." Sharp increases seen in the past, he said, "don't seem to be taking place."

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